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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003933

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SUBJECT: (S/NF) BRITISH DATT SHARES REPORT ON BASRA INCIDENT

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford  
for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (S/NF) SUMMARY. The British decision to use force to extract eight UK soldiers being held by the Iraqi Police (IP) in Basra was taken only after the British became convinced that the national and local Iraqi governments were not in control of the situation and that the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) Shia militia had taken physical custody of two of the service members. The initial incident, which led to the arrest of the servicemen, in which one or two IP were killed by two undercover UK soldiers, is under investigation. END SUMMARY.

2. (S/NF) British Defense Attache Colonel Alastair Campbell met with PolOff and PolMilOff to share the HMG's "Secret-Eyes Only" report on the September 19 Basra incident which resulted in the forced extraction from Iraqi custody of eight UK nationals.

3. (SBU) COL Campbell confirmed the general sequence of events to have been as follows: Two UK soldiers working undercover were involved in a shootout at 10:20 am with Iraqi Police (IP), resulting in the death of one IP and the wounding of another. The two UK soldiers were arrested by IP and taken into custody. Several more UK soldiers arrived at the IP station to negotiate the release of the soldiers while UK military units secured the immediate area. At 3:30 pm, a crowd of several hundred people gathered and began to throw gasoline bombs and rocks at the UK vehicles. One UK armored personnel carrier was burned and a number of UK soldiers were injured in the process. At 10:00 pm that evening, UK forces broke down a wall to the IP station and extracted the six-member negotiating team. Still later that evening, a UK team raided a nearby home and extracted the two soldiers.

Who Started Shooting?

4. (S/NF) Based on the UK internal report, the specific incident that prompted the shooting is yet unknown. The two UK SAS soldiers spoke no Arabic and were dressed in local Arab garb. They were confronted by two IP who were also in civilian clothes. The UK report suggests that the soldiers may have thought the two IP were bandits. It is not yet known who shot first nor is it known if the IP shot at all. It is known that one IP was killed and the other wounded. (Note: A number of reports indicated that two IP were killed during the day suggesting that the wounded IP may have died. End Note.) Following this shootout, the UK soldiers hijacked a car and left the scene. They came upon an IP checkpoint and identified themselves to the IP as UK soldiers. They were taken into custody at the Al-Jameat IP Headquarters in Basra City.

The Negotiation Process

5. (S/NF) Six UK military personnel were dispatched to the IP station to negotiate the release of the soldiers. They argued that CPA Order 17 required that the men be turned over the British no matter what they had allegedly done. The six were prevented from leaving the premises by the IP. Sometime in the afternoon, the UK military placed a cordon around the area to secure it. The Commander of the UK 12th Mechanized Brigade Brigadier John Lorimer contacted Governor Mohammed Al-Waili and the Basra Chief of Police (CoP) Major General Hasan al-Saad. A mechanism was devised by which a local Judge would issue a release order based on CPA Order 17. The Judge requested a letter from the UK military saying the two were indeed UK soldiers. A letter was provided at 6:30 pm but the order was never issued. The Judge later claimed he never got the letter.

6. (S/NF) UK Ambassador Patey contacted Minister of Interior (MOI) Bayan Jabr Solagh. The MOI issued an

order at 7:30 pm to the Chief of Police and the Governor to release the men. The order was not executed. Sometime during the day communications between the negotiating team were lost. The UK cordon around the IP station was pulled back after a 3:30 pm mob attack on a Warrior armored personnel carrier (APC) which resulted in 19 UK injuries (none life threatening.) During that incident, UK troops fired warning shots above the heads of the 2-300 rioters and per the UK report, there were no reports of any Iraqi casualties in this exchange. At 8 pm, the UK forces received approval (not specified by whom) to forcibly extract their troops. At 8:12 pm, Brigadier Lorimer and the Governor/CoP came to agreement that the UK could quietly extract the eight soldiers from the rear of the IP station at 10 pm to avoid exciting the crowd. At 9:35 pm, the Governor told Lorimer that the 2 SAS soldiers were "removed" by members of Moqtada al-Sadr's JAM militia who "overwhelmed the local police." UK forces were aware from signals intelligence that the 2 soldiers were, in fact, moved earlier by unknown persons to another location.

#### The Decision to Forcibly Extract

17. (S/NF) COL Campbell said that the decision to forcibly extract the UK soldiers was taken for the following reasons: the loss of communication with the negotiating team; the information that the two soldiers were in the custody of JAM members; the fact that the two soldiers had been moved to another location; and indications that the IP was no longer in control of the situation. COL Campbell noted that lack of progress on the negotiating front and fear for the safety of their troops was the main motivation to the decision to act.

18. (S/NF) At the previously arranged time of 10 pm, the British sent several Warrior APCs to the back of the IP station. According to the UK report, they broke through an exterior wall of the compound reportedly because the gate could not accommodate the vehicles. The team extracted the six-member negotiating team and searched the police station to verify that the two SAS soldiers were not present. Contrary to press reports, no walls of the building itself were breached and no prisoners escaped from the building. The IP fled the building when the UK troops arrived - no shots were fired during the exercise.

19. (S/NF) At 11:10 pm, a second location in the Hayannah area of Basra (about 1 kilometer from the IP station), were raided by UK troops. The British forces encountered no resistance from the five JAM guards who fled the approaching troops. The two UK SAS soldiers were located and returned to the UK base. They did not have serious injuries though they were "roughed up" by the IP when they were arrested.

Loose Ends

10. (S/NF) Sometime during the negotiation process, Amb. Patey also contacted Deputy Prime Minister Chalabi who expressed readiness to use his contacts with Sadr to secure the release of the soldiers. Events moved so quickly that the offer was not utilized. The UK military is conducting an investigation into the incident and expects to issue a report to the GOI (and a public statement) by September 22. The two SAS soldiers are being debriefed and will be removed from Iraq on September 21.

Comment

11. (S/NF) Other channels' reporting suggests that Muqtada Sadr wanted to disassociate himself from this affair and that the Basra Governor himself often did not understand events on the ground. Also notable was how little control the central government authorities, including the Minister of Interior, had over the local police authorities in Basra.

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